

OSBERN & URSINE

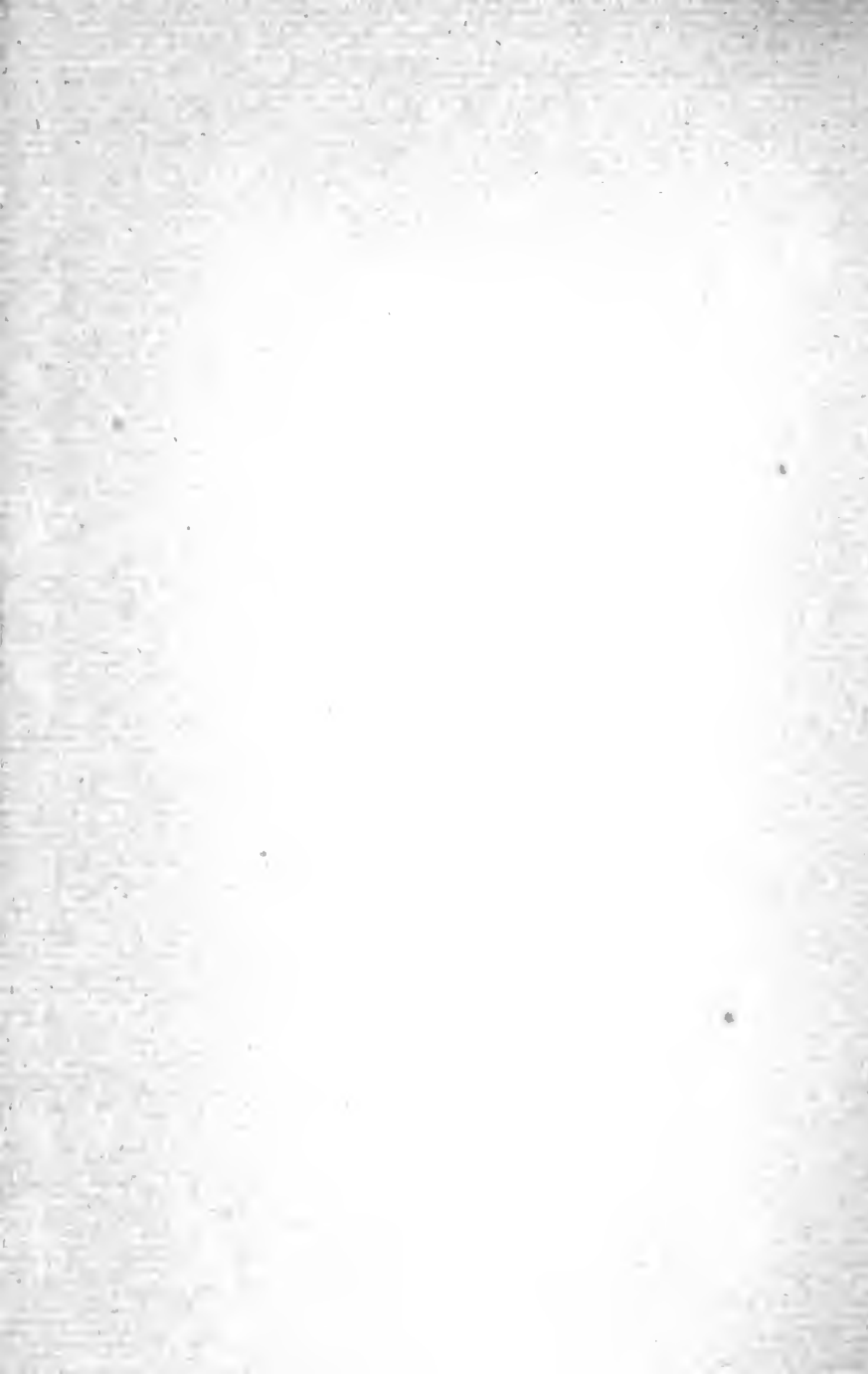


BY JOHN OLIVER HOBBS.



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OSBERN & URSYNE



OSBERN AND URSINE.

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS.
By JOHN OLIVER HOBBS.



JOHN LANE
LONDON
AND
NEW-YORK.

1900

P.W.

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PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

HUGH, EARL OF CARLIOL.

OSBERN, *his cousin ; a member of Count Geoffrey's household.*

EADRIC, *a Saxon.*

THE ABBOT.

COUNT GEOFFREY.

URSYNE, *his daughter.*

ARLETTE OF BELESMES, *his niece and ward.*

CECILY

MURIEL

JACQUELINE

BLANCHE

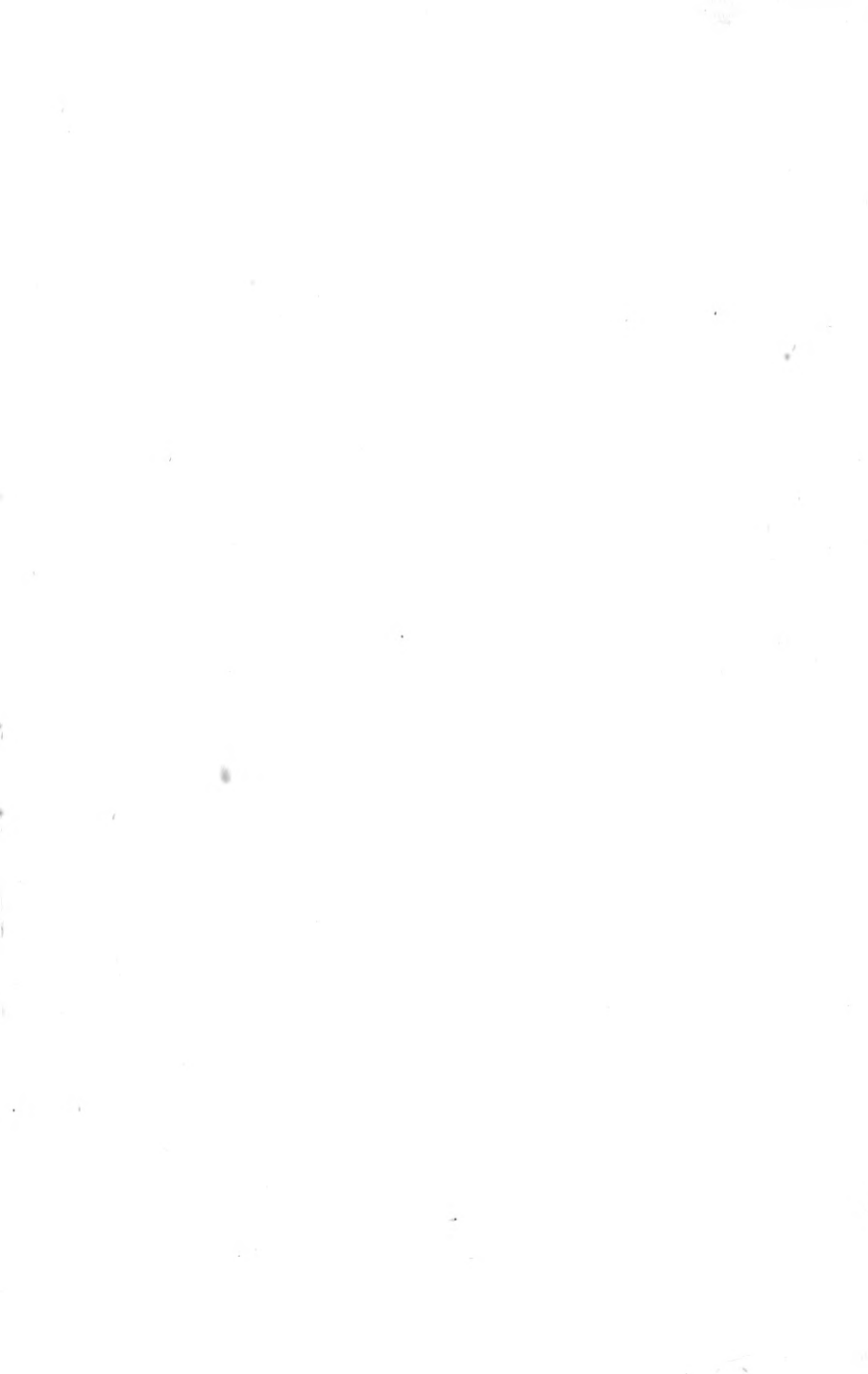
HENRY

ALAN

} *Ladies attendant on Arlette of Belesmes.*

} *Members of the household.*

PERIOD—1098.



ACT I

SCENE I.—*A room in the castle of Count Geoffrey.*

SCENE II.—*A copse near the castle.*

SCENE III.—*Same as Scene I.*

Four hours elapse.

ACT II

SCENE I.—*The great hall of the castle.*

Five minutes elapse.

ACT III

SCENE I.—*The great hall of the castle.*

SCENE II.—*Osbern's room.*

SCENE III.—*The great hall of the castle.*



OSBERN AND URSYNE

ACT I

SCENE I

SCENE : *Room in the English Castle of* COUNT GEOFFREY. URSYNE, *a girl of twenty, very delicate in expression and countenance, but with no suggestion of morbidity, is standing on a kind of raised stool, looking out of the window. The room is lit by two torches. One is placed in the corner away from URSYNE; the other at back of stage near OSBERN, who is working at a table with his back to the audience. At the opposite end of the room, which can be divided by a long curtain, a group of girls are sitting together—ARLETTE, MURIEL, JACQUELINE and BLANCHE. CECILY sits apart with an instrument, and is apparently resting as the curtain goes up.*

OSBERN AND URSYNE

URSYNE.

[*To herself.*] Setting sun and joy of life all
quenched,
Trembling sea, and trees tall in the dusk.
The north wind drives the fallen leaves,
They dance and reel,
And seem to feel
Spring thrilling with her soft reprieves
From winter's blight.
Birds in their nests lie warm ;
But black rooks take their flight.
Wild restless ones !
Why will ye fight with sleep ?
For night—night comes.

[URSYNE *sighs deeply and continues*
looking out of the window.

CECILY.

[*Singing.*] "Adieu," said he. Adieu she
could not say.
"Farewell," said he. "Farewell, this is a day
That we must long remember, you and I."

"He's gone," said they. "Come forth, clouds
fill the sky,
The rain will fall ere you have felt the sun."
"Shines the sun still ? I thought rain had
begun."

[URSYNE *comes down from window,*

OSBERN AND URSYNE

drags curtain across, separating herself from the rest of the girls.

URSYNE.

Here it is cold. [*She goes back to the window.*]

BLANCHE.

How desolate she seems !
No song of love has ever reached her ears,
For who that loves doth ever sigh for death ?

ARLETTE.

Hush ! Hush !

BLANCHE.

Why hush ?

ARLETTE.

She never talks of love.

MURIEL.

How oft, then, must she think of it !

BLANCHE.

Oh, hush !

ARLETTE.

New damoiselle from France, you should be
courtly.

[*ARLETTE goes out.*]

OSBERN AND URSYNE

CECILY.

She could not hear. We hate her. She's a witch.

JACQUELINE.

[*Mysteriously.*] Secrets have I,
Not from the sky !
Ursyne could tell
Better than well,
Why she is sad
While we are glad,
Why it is cold
In towers old,
When maidens sing
Of anything
Which brings to mind
Lovers unkind !

BLANCHE.

Jacqueline !

JACQUELINE.

Earl Hugh came here from Normandy
Two years ago. He sailed to see
Whether the praise he heard was verity,
Concerning Arlette of Belesmes,
Lovely of face and sweet in fame,
Not yet sixteen.—What piteous blame !

BLANCHE.

Jacqueline !

OSBERN AND URSYNE

JACQUELINE.

Betrothed were they, but, since her years
Were still so new, the Earl had fears
Marriage would bring but showers of tears.
He thought this more when he saw there
Her cousin Ursyne's raven hair,
And eyes that drew him with flames more fair
Than Elfin light on marshes deep.
Whene'er he looked, she seemed to weep.
Little by little, false love did creep
Into his heart. Betrothed was he
To Arlette, yet, O, misery !
Ursyne did hold him in captivity.

MURIEL.

Arlette, methinks, can have no pride,
Despised so soon—not yet a bride.
Ships borne to sea by an unwilling tide
Are often wrecked !

JACQUELINE.

She never knew.

But when the silver trumpets blew
For Holy War 'gainst sinful Turk and Jew,
Scarce were her tears at his desire
To win a martyr's crown, or fire
All infidel mosques. He rode away :
His cross was red : the morning grey

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Was glittering as some moonlit bay
Of waters dark, for his bright spear
And helmet shone like crystal clear.
“One kiss,” he cried, “then pray for me, my
dear !”

BLANCHE.

Jacqueline !

JACQUELINE.

Earl Hugh was slain : Arlette is free :
Ursyne in woe must ever be,
Dreading the doom of her iniquity.

BLANCHE.

Jacqueline !

CECILY.

[*Peeping through curtain at URSYNE
and pointing to OSBERN.*]

The witch is still,
But, by her will,
She calls the spell
Of madness from Hell,
For Osbern, the knave,
Handsome and brave,
Ignoble in birth,
Cursed on the earth,
His father's sin to bear,
His mother's shame to wear !

OSBERN AND URSYNE

MURIEL.

Who is this Osbern?

BLANCHE.

'Tis Carliol's cousin.

MURIEL.

The great Earl's cousin? Is't by virtue of
blood?

JACQUELINE.

Nay, rather by his mother's lack of virtue!

BLANCHE.

For shame! for shame! Count Geoffrey much
regards him.

He's something lunatic and would be a poet.
Meanwhile he casts long sums and writes in
Latin

Old stuff that's counted precious.

JACQUELINE.

I would not read it.

MURIEL.

And I had rather sleep and eat and dance
Than hear a nightingale any day o' the week!
Come, come. Let's to the court and laugh
awhile.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

[They all go out. OSBERN, who has been seated at the back of the stage, now comes forward. He rubs his eyes and draws back the long curtain and looks at URSYNE for some moments before he speaks. He is a young man, about twenty-six, vigorous in appearance, but with an ascetic countenance.]

OSBERN.

What do you think of while you sit alone ?

URSYNE.

I think of summers that are past and stars
That fall.

OSBERN.

But, if they fall from heaven to earth,
The earth is very fair, Ursyne !

URSYNE.

Alas !

I do not see it so.

OSBERN.

Then through your eyes,
I'll watch a wretchedness so set in beauty.

URSYNE.

Is stark damnation sadder than the world

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Which, compassed about with happiness, still
feels

No touch of it? For what is good, I find not.

OSBERN.

*[Going up to her and looking into her
eyes.]*

O, more mysterious than an autumn night,
Grave as a wintry sea with all its storms
Enchanted and entranced! Let me sink deep
And drown myself!

URSYNE.

You have your cousin's voice—
Your cousin's very voice.

OSBERN.

But he is dead.
We live—we live, Ursyne, and this is life.

URSYNE.

Once he said that.

OSBERN.

And he said all things well!
But, as thou sayest I have his voice to speak
with,
Give me the kiss that taught his lips their
utterance,

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Then you shall hear what desperate men dare
do
When they are cursed in loving, and all the
war
They make is on their mutinous hearts. God
knows !

URSYNE.

God sees that I am trembling—yet, I listen.

OSBERN.

Stars that are brightest tremble most, sweet
lady !
In overwhelming love—in jealousy's grief,
Vainly I sought to say what I say now.
Be but a little patient ! I have had patience
While sore incurable hopes grew on my soul.
Teach me your sorceries that I may know
When seven devils come to me. Their malice
Could not be half so subtle as this hair
Which, like a serpent, winds around my being,
Till I could faint in ecstasies of love
Or—death. I know not which, I am become,
So strange from desperation.

URSYNE.

I fear your mind.
'Tis treacherous, bound to the Furies, all
Uncertain.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

OSBERN.

Was I not born without the law ?

URSYNE.

Why dost thou always harp upon these wrongs ?

Hate will undo you : there shall be madness next.

[*With terror.*] At night I hear the crackling laugh of fools,

Yet my room's empty but for owls and bats.

OSBERN.

O, how this acid passion of grief doth waste Thy conscience ! One would think there were more causes——

Nay, I'll not think it. [*Aside.*] Sin would be more silent,

Would show a smoother resignation. Sin

Would fold its disannulling hands, and speak Gaping beatitudes about God's will——

But this once answer me—did he, at any time, Threaten or breathe that thou wast greatly loved ?

URSYNE.

He came for Arlette. Laughing, I peeped to see

My little cousin's bridegroom : he looked also.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

OSBERN.

That glance became intangled, past unravel-
ling. . . .

URSYNE.

Arlette played melodies ; I stole away
Into the outer court and watched our men,
Who, barely strong enough to lift his armour,
Were cleansing it from dust. In mirth I
breathed
Upon the heavy plate that shields his breast,
And, with my sleeve, did make it bright as
glass,
Where, bending low, I could discern no
Arlette,
But my own face affrighted at its joy.

OSBERN.

O, woman's loving is more soft than ours,
And gains such rapture from some foolish
omen
As we, in all our might, cannot extract
From Nature's best reality.

URSYNE.

No more
We looked, and, after that, I laughed no more.
We met and passed and passed and met each
day.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Each evening, from the hall where others
danced,
I crept away ; nor did I think of love,
Nor anything disloyal to Arlette.
But it was sad to sleep whilst others danced.

OSBERN.

And did you sleep ?

URSYNE.

Yes ; for in sleep I lost
The dreams life gave. . . . Then, after twenty
days,
He rode away and I was left continuing. . . .
That morn we spoke. What words he said, I
heard not,
But, now he's dead, I do remember them,
And they come back like distant music played
Behind great gates of bronze and adamant.

OSBERN.

And is this all ?

URSYNE.

Could there be more than this ?
He was betrothed to Arlette.

OSBERN.

[*Ironically.*]

I had forgotten !
[*A knocking is heard.*]

OSBERN AND URSYNE

URSYNE.

My father has come.

OSBERN.

Hath he found the lovers?

URSYNE.

[*Smiling.*] *Lovers!* Thou art handsome but
thou art crazed!

OSBERN.

[*Mocking.*] Ursyne sees the dead; she is
blind to the living!

URSYNE.

What have I missed, wise Osbern?

OSBERN.

The game of Fate, swifter than God!
[*With a hidden sneer.*] I can tell you the
tale of a maid who is not weeping like a
widow. She does not sit a poor languishing
bird, without mate or answering voice. Her
love is not for the absent.

URSYNE.

What would you say?

OSBERN AND URSYNE

OSBERN.

I say that Arlette hath found a husband—Eadric the Saxon. They meet in the twilight by the lake, and in the orchard, and in the copse. There are pretty meetings. The man hath honour : on his side it is worship, and on hers it is innocence. But if there is much honesty, there is more love.

URSYNE.

[*Slowly.*] How soon she hath learnt forgetting ! Carliol now is surely mine, for I am found faithful.

OSBERN.

[*Mocking.*] You touch derision's bell ! Hast no interest in thy yearning cousin ? Shall she marry a Saxon ? I speak of Arlette, I hint at peril—the peril of marriage ; straightway you thank God for her fickleness, saying, Carliol is the more mine. I, only I, am faithful. Blessings on Arlette—blessings on her new love. Who is he ? Yet no matter ; I am found faithful ! Girl ! girl ! thou shalt surely die of this. I read it ! I read it !

URSYNE.

I would read gladly in that book.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

OSBERN.

Wouldst thou then yield thy fragrant youth
to death?

Sink this soft image of white perfectness
In those dark dregs where roots and creeping
things

Seethe in the primal heat ere they become
Matter that's fit for th' sight. Art thou
declined

To that foul kettle? And why? Is it for
God?

His greater glory? Nay, 'tis a spleen—a
rage,

A sick discouragement, that comes from
loving

Some pretty, strutting, eloquent, hardened
dust

You took to be a man. I see too well.

URSYNE.

He who seeks love must have himself the
quality

To comprehend its essence. Thou art far
From that deep knowledge.

[URSYNE *goes out.*

OSBERN.

O, not so far, Ursyne.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

*[He throws up his arms in despair,
then casts himself down at the table,
burying his face in his hands.
Enter the ABBOT.]*

ABBOT.

My son, thou art cast down. For three things do young men suffer—the vain love of this world, the excessive love of self, or the inordinate love of some creature !

OSBERN.

I do confess my great affection. I deny it not, just as I do not deny that I am a man. I can feel pain, and that in spite of myself. I can love a woman. You may call this carnal. I say that it is human.

ABBOT.

Let thy affliction instruct thee, not destroy thee. All things fall short of being perfect ; none are safe ; many are beyond thy prayer.

OSBERN.

True. Yet I have blood in my veins, and where the knife pierces I must bleed ; and if I am stricken I must grieve.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

ABBOT.

Take upon your brow and your shoulders the mark of salvation ; march, in arms, under the standard of the living God. Give your life to the service of your brothers, and so find peace.

OSBERN.

Aye, in peace is my bitterness most bitter !

ABBOT.

Join this holy pilgrimage, and a hard road under thy feet will ease thy troubled spirit.

OSBERN.

Ask me again—not now, not now.

ABBOT.

The pilgrims go at daybreak.

OSBERN.

Not now !

ABBOT.

Such wilfulness, my son, is sin.

OSBERN.

So be it, then. My will is all I have ; when I renounce that I give up everything, and I

OSBERN AND URSYNE

am not yet ready for that sacrifice. I can fast ;
I can spend whole nights upon my knees. I
can let chains fret into my flesh ; I fear neither
cold, nor heat, nor scourgings, nor austerities.
But my will is my will.

ABBOT.

The pilgrims go at daybreak !

OSBERN.

My father, I shall rise earlier than they to
watch their setting forth ! . . .

*[The ABBOT lifts up his hands, shakes
his head, and goes out.]*

OSBERN.

O God ! I give Thee all—except my will !

END OF SCENE I.

SCENE II

SCENE: *A copse. EADRIC waits by the path,
and through the trees ARLETTE is seen
approaching. She walks slowly and reaches
him in silence.*

OSBERN AND URSYNE

EADRIC.

The wood is white with your paleness, sweet
Arlette.

ARLETTE.

Accusing cares flock round my joy this day.
I dared not think or speak the name of Eadric.
Love that is secret hath remorse for friend.

EADRIC.

My sweet Arlette, from sunny France you
came
To these bleak hills, black woods, and skies
forlorn.
My rose, more beautiful than the shining sun,
If you should go away, how should I live?

ARLETTE.

I could not leave thee though they bore me
hence,
And, under fathoms of ground, laid me to
sleep.
My home is in thine heart and there I'll rest,
As some small seagull nestling on the sea,
Floats o'er the agitations of each tide
With confident peace.

EADRIC.

O, my sole joy on earth,

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Flower too silken, too delicate and white
For my rough hold, how I do worship thee !
Yet, I'll not call thee angel lest thou change
By that rash word into the phantom beauty
I may adore but never quite possess.
In wrath I lived here, heartsick, sorrowing,
Thrall to one constant thought which was a
 hate
Against thy race. My murdered kinsmen
 stood
With dreadful wounds entreating swift re-
 venge
For injuries dire.

ARLETTE.

Beloved, say no more.
You look so sternly toward me, I could weep.

EADRIC.

Dear love, I feel ashamed at thy pure face.
It is a milky pearl set in the air
To make my blackness seem the more corrupt.
Yet, when I turn aside, my eyelids ache,
And I would seek once more humiliation
Given with a recompense that's infinite !
 [Kneels at her feet.]

ARLETTE.

[Looking away from him.] Around the pallid
south, stars pierce the twilight.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Dear, I must go. But yes—Ursyne is waiting.
I trust her well. She is an intercessor
Who hath compassion for fidelity.
She once did love a great lord who is dead.
She does not speak of him : his name I know
not.

Often I sit close by her while she thinks.
Companions in our silence, we have watched
The blaze of many fires and heard the logs
Sing their shrill song while the hot flames consumed them.
“ Ah,” said she once, “ a woman would die
thus ! ”

EADRIC.

I doubt a sorrow when it mutters words
Too wise. Witches do that.

ARLETTE.

She is no witch !
Swiftly I'll go and beg her influence.
Get you to prayer, then wait upon my uncle.

EADRIC.

But he shall hear defiance, not entreaties.

ARLETTE.

Thou art a Saxon—free—the son of kings,
And when thou call'st, I follow, not rebellious,

OSBERN AND URSYNE

But conquered by the pride of my own choice.
Be sure that Norman love is as thine own. . .

EADRIC.

Eternal !

[They embrace ; she leaves him. He watches her till she is out of sight, then follows at a distance.]

END OF SCENE II.

SCENE III

SCENE : *The same as Scene I.* URSYNE enters bearing a torch, followed by COUNT GEOFFREY.

URSYNE.

Why are you late ? Colder now grows this room.

[She goes back to her place by the window. COUNT GEOFFREY watches her from where he stands by the fire.]

The wind, more dismal still, howls the lament
Of everlasting love, bound in the air,
To feel both fire and frost and chilly rain,
But never the sweet flowering of the Spring.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

My element is earth, yet I could sob
With thee! O, dark, cold night—if I had
wings!

COUNT GEOFFREY.

The night is quiet and I hear no wind.

URSYNE.

Then it must be presentiment of woe
That gnaws my heart whilst I sit watching
here.
Watching—for whom? Waiting—for whom?

COUNT GEOFFREY.

Strange news that will interpret well these
portents. I bring
[*She comes down the stage.*]
Turn thy white face toward me. It is sad.
How old art thou?

URSYNE.

Twenty, and that's too long.

COUNT GEOFFREY.

Dost thou hate all men?

URSYNE.

All living men save thee.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

COUNT GEOFFREY.

Many brave knights have begged thy hand,
Ursyne.
Though thou art poor, thy beauty looks more
rare
Than all the land and dower of Arlette.

URSYNE.

Let Arlette be.

COUNT GEOFFREY.

No envy need afflict
Thy girlhood's pride because of this rich
cousin.
Arlette may buy a husband, while for thee
There's the devotion that a man achieves
When he's competitor and not the prize.

URSYNE.

My mind is not for marriage. Oft I think
That my wild heart is with some damned
soul
Already suffering all the pangs of hell.
My body's here, my spirit's far away,
Driven and tossed, and tortured on a rack,
Which does not rend the less because it is
Invisible! O God!

OSBERN AND URSYNE

COUNT GEOFFREY.

Go and confess.

Thy solitude is shared by whispering fiends.
Thou art too much alone. Acts of contrition
Will drive away these mad and gloomy
thoughts.

Come, be not sullen. What? She loves no
man?

She has no curiosity—perverse!

I have great news. Wilt thou not beg for
them?

URSYNE.

All tidings come full soon. Is England lost?
Is Normandy become a wilderness?

Has the day's sport been somewhat better or
worse

Than the day's sport this day, this month,
last year?

COUNT GEOFFREY.

Now wide astonishment, larger than any hope,
Will catch these roving eyes, and light these
cheeks.

My news affects thy cousin more than thee,
And her young soul, more womanish and frail
Than thine, may grow distraught from th'
violence

Of unexpected joy. Tranquillity
Broods o'er thy nature and to thee emotion

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Is but a lake that sleeps among high hills.
Therefore, I'll make no phrase. Hear the
plain truth.
Hugh of Carliol is not dead. He lives !

URSYNE.

[*Stupefied.*] Hugh of Carliol is not dead !
He lives !

COUNT GEOFFREY.

Send for thy cousin, and, if thou hast a heart
Under that iron shell which seems a girl,
Say this : Kind Heaven, perceiving her dis-
tress,
Has heard our supplications and preserved
Her bridegroom from that sleep the sword
doth give
More certainly than either drug or herb.

URSYNE.

[*Repeating mechanically.*] That sleep the sword
doth give more certainly
Than either drug or herb.

COUNT GEOFFREY.

What dost thou say ?

URSYNE.

I say thy news is strange.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

COUNT GEOFFREY.

I'll call Arlette, and, at the curfew bell,
Th' assembled household shall give thanks to
God

For this deliverance from the enemy.

[COUNT GEOFFREY *goes out*.

URSYNE.

O, at his rumoured death my spirit left me
To join its wild associate in pain.
Then we were one—to-night we are dis-
severed.

I fall again to life as one that wakes
From fierce delirium to the surgeon's knife,
But to exchange the anguish of the mind
For butchery's cold steel.—O, who would live,
Or who would love this world or any on it,
When penalties await each pitiful joy
Snatched from the aching littleness of time !
And he was mine, being dead, no barrier
Could stay the dear approach of our two wills.
Supreme, insatiable was the thirst
Each owned for the other's self, till, made one
wave,

We lashed the world's harsh shore, and ever
gained,

Recoiling, newer force to smite that sand !
This is no more. Already, love, thou'rt gone,
And, as the amber east of this bleak morning

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Was fast obscured by clinging, feverous mists,
So doth thy spirit fade from my desire,
And all I journey with is emptiness !

Enter OSBERN.

OSBERN.

Ursyne !

URSYNE.

Alas !

OSBERN.

Alas ! Hast thou no word save this ? I hate Carliol and I curse the good news. So much, then, for my hate. But is thy love of such ethereal quality that neither death nor life affects it ? Is it “ Alas ! ” both ways ?

URSYNE.

Yes, for my will is struggling against treason. If I kill the treason—as I shall—I must die for the sorrowful victory ! And if my will is overpowered—as it must not be—I shall perish from the shame of defeat. And thus—it *is* “ Alas ! ” both ways !

OSBERN.

What wilt thou say to Carliol when he comes ?

OSBERN AND URSYNE

URSYNE.

There is nothing left to say. My heart—which holds my words—is broken.

OSBERN.

[*Passionately.*] And me? and me? and me? Do you never think of me, or understand me? There are women who will give love for love. There are women who, seeing that they may save a soul by loving it, do love it for that reason! But you are cold, dumb, merciless!

URSYNE.

No, no! If I still live, Osbern, it is because of thee.

OSBERN.

Ah! [*Touches her hand.*] Is this true?

URSYNE.

And I know more—I would not have thee marry another. Take vows, dear Osbern—take vows. Never marry. No woman could make thee happy.

OSBERN.

No other woman could make me unhappy! When I see some beauty, I ask myself, Could this paragon give me one minute of despair?

OSBERN AND URSYNE

I laugh! Ah, Ursyne, thou hast no cause for jealousy. Thou art the one source of my undying wretchedness. In this you have no rival!

URSYNE.

When I look at you, and hear you, I think it is well I do not love you.

OSBERN.

Why?

URSYNE.

Because I should have loved you far too well!
Ah, had I known you ere Carliol came,
Then all my life had changed from woe to

rest,

Then, as some poor white sail shines by the
sun

And seems a wing of brightness till the night,
So I had been rejoicing in your love.

But you were born for more than woman's
praise,

And I come as a sad song in your way,
You'll hear me and pass on, and think at last,
"I wonder was that song some winter's
dream?"

OSBERN.

Extreme grief hath no fear, nor limit, nor
shame . . .

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Its violence, impalpable as the wind,
Scatters our inmost nature till we seem
Bare empty trees with neither wood nor
leaves—

But only bark that's brittle, and soon dust !

[ARLETTE enters, and OSBERN goes out.

ARLETTE comes timidly and takes a
stool by the fire. URSYNE hesitates
a moment and then goes to her.

URSYNE.

Why do you sit apart so white and still,
And colour suddenly when footsteps follow ?
Why do you watch the burning embers till
They flush too bright and in the ashes die ?
And, ever through your laugh, a cutting
sigh
Pricks through the mirth. My bird, Arlette,
say truly.
Is it because you mourn the dead unduly ?

ARLETTE.

[*Surprised.*] The dead ! Now, speak not of
the dead ! I pray
Their souls may rest in peace. Thoughts
more prolonged
Spoil what remains to us, and, shedding tears,
We miss an immediate glory. Is it not so ?

OSBERN AND URSYNE

URSYNE.

How love will teach the purest heart decep-
tion !

My bird chirps well the teaching of the
Church !

ARLETTE.

Those great long words, I know, are not my
own,
Yet I feel all their sense.

URSYNE.

[*With mockery.*] Why then this pallor !
This pensive look when, supperless at night,
You steal away to watch the glittering sky,
And rise at dawn ere the empurpled clouds
Have risen like mountains on the east hori-
zon ?

When the last morning stars retreat to heaven,
When the moon's light doth mingle with the
sun's

First radiance—my Arlette then doth wake,
It may be, murmuring prayers, but I think
not !

ARLETTE.

Ah, dear Ursyne . . .

[*She pauses.*]

URSYNE.

Now is the white face red,

OSBERN AND URSYNE

The bud becomes a flower, the thought a blush.
Denials would be vain, my accusation
Blames not the purity of your dreaming mind,
For, where's the harm, though you are sick
with love.

The state is unfamiliar to your knowledge.
How could you guess that when you search
the clouds,
Or sigh because a melancholy note
Drives you to think the passingness of life
Is all too swift—that *this* is love—not wisdom !

ARLETTE.

I think if I did love I could discern
The difference between an orison
And this compelling, sweet, perpetual spell.
I say, if I did love, Ursyne.

URSYNE.

And do you ?

ARLETTE.

Should I declare outright that intimate secret
I scarce could breathe even to him who holds
My heart's allegiance ? Help me, Ursyne.

URSYNE.

Here's woe indeed !

[OSBERN *enters during following speech,*
unperceived by the two women.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

ARLETTE.

Let me come near thee now.
Stay with me but a while. It frightens me
When, in a sombre mood, you fly away
From my poor presence, and ominously talk
To unseen ears. Somewhat I have to tell . . .

URSYNE.

Nay, tell it not, save to the one who holds
Thy heart's allegiance! The Earl still lives.
Thy lover was not slain. Carliol comes
To claim thy promised faith.

*[Voices heard from the chapel chanting
the Te Deum. ARLETTE falls in
a swoon.]*

URSYNE.

[Contemptuously.] Why does she fall?

OSBERN.

[With a sinister laugh.] I think it must be
joy! *Te Deum laudamus.*

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II

SCENE : *The great hall of the castle, showing entrance door at R. Large staircase at back of stage. At L. a large fireplace, near it a narrow table spread with supper for two or three persons. At R. there is a high-backed carved-oak seat, long enough to seat several people. Torches are placed all round the hall, and garlands. BLANCHE and JACQUELINE stand well forward. Enter ALAN, an attendant.*

ALAN.

Haste! Haste! Go, call our mistress. Soon they come.

Soon shall we hear the trample of glad hoofs!
Where is our lady? Ill will it seem and rude
If she wait not with torch and outstretched
arm

To greet the miraculous coming of her lord.

[*He rushes out. At top of staircase*

URSYNE and ARLETTE appear,
both carrying torches. ARLETTE

OSBERN AND URSYNE

leans heavily upon the staircase as she comes down. URSYNE is self-possessed and exultant.

BLANCHE.

Lo ! she appears. Never was love like this
Death, e'er its final triumphing, is such.

JACQUELINE.

Yet mark Ursyne ! As Lucifer she shines
Beside that perished light flickering in tears.
[URSYNE and ARLETTE have now
reached the foot of the staircase.

ARLETTE.

Have I my torch, Ursyne ?

URSYNE.

Aye, hold it straight,
As I do mine. Some little spark may fall
And burn into your cheek the crimson hue
Which joyous love strangely omits to paint
there.

ARLETTE.

Stand close, Ursyne. Be near me when he
comes.

If I am wordless, and I think I shall be,
Speak my just welcome. Say I honour him.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

But, say I honour him as handmaid should
A majesty so high. . . . If, because I seem—
If . . . O, my heart doth sicken, stir and
droop.

I have done no wrong, and yet, a guilty
wretch,

I see this, as it were, a judgment hall,
With yellow faces peering through the gloom,
And all around black shapes and questionings.

URSYNE.

Give me your hand. Poor leaf, it flutters here,
Vanquishing by its weakness my disdain,
Drawing from my stone heart th' imprisoned
pity
I thought to keep there in its dungeon sealed.

OSBERN *enters*.

OSBERN.

[*Shouting.*] Carliol comes! Hail! my great
cousin, hail!

Carliol comes to see the immovable world
Spin at his bidding! Miracles, no longer
Worked on the commonalty, are for him
Reserved. Arise, new Lazarus, from the
grave!

Sweet bride, it is Carliol; lift up thine eyes.
Thou art a wife of youth! It is the Earl,

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Thy husband, thy beloved ! It is he
To whom thy being, body and soul, belongs.
Flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone. The Law
Is grand and overwhelming on that point.
Ursyne, endorse my orthodoxy. Own
That I speak words of simple edification !

URSYNE.

With an entireness love might wish less full !

OSBERN.

Ah, women think of love, men are for doctrine !

I meant no more.

ARLETTE.

Would doctrine were enough !

[ARLETTE *moves away*.]

OSBERN.

Hath she seen Eadric since this news of
Hugh ?

URSYNE.

No.

OSBERN.

Hath she sent word to him by messenger ?

URSYNE.

No.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

OSBERN.

I would spare youth such grief.

URSYNE.

Art thou not young?

OSBERN.

[*With sarcasm.*] But have I grief? Am I
not blessed and glad?
Do I long, in my folly, for one look,
One touch, one sight of creature that I love?
Do I love? can I love? Nay, I'm too wise—
My youth doth differ from all other youth!

URSYNE.

Ah, Osbern, on this night of desolate joy,
I need thy care, not thy philosophy!

OSBERN.

My care? Is that then something in thy life?

URSYNE.

Nay, not something—all!

[CARLIOL'S voice is heard in the court-
yard. The household form in two
lines. ARLETTE and URSYNE
stand together waiting to receive

OSBERN AND URSYNE

CARLIOL. OSBERN *watches them from the opposite side.*

CARLIOL.

Heard without.] Give God the glory !
[*Enters.*

Nay, nay, you will unman me. I am stronger
Before the enemy than with friends so kind.

[COUNT GEOFFREY *goes towards him, leading* ARLETTE.

Arlette !

ARLETTE.

[*Kissing his hand.*] I am Arlette, but greatly
altered.

CARLIOL.

[*Embracing her and drawing her apart.*
This is Arlette, the child that I have dreamed
of,

When retrospects were all the semblance left
me

Of earth's delight : when, in an alien camp,
A foe's uncertain charity watched me sleep,
Thy shadow fell upon my measure of life,
Making it rosy as the blossoming may
In that fair garden where I walked with
thee

First, and told my love. Dost thou re-
member ?

OSBERN AND URSYNE

URSYNE.

[*Aside.*] At the last day much shall be pardoned me
For that I suffer now.

ARLETTE.

There is Ursyne.

CARLIOL.

Ursyne ! [*Pauses, then goes towards her.*]

URSYNE.

My Lord.

[*They look at each other without speaking.*]

OSBERN.

[*Dashing forward.*] Now let us sup and dance !
These unimaginable moments lack
Th' appropriate language we would give to
them.

For daily talk and excellent occasions
There is a stock of sentiments all wound
Like skeins of wool around our tongues. We
hold them
Deliciously tinged for every use.
But, for an hour like this, what's there to say?
Light souls may leap ; sound stomachs crave
strong food

OSBERN AND URSYNE

And hearts of sensibility cease beating
Fearing to live, lest th' ineffable silence
Should be too swiftly broken by a word.

COUNT GEOFFREY.

[*To CARLIOL.*] Admirable sense ! much lurks
in that scorned head !

CARLIOL.

Poor Osbern ! I had thought to see thee wed !
'Tis not in woman to neglect thy heart.
And, never yet did men of our strong wills,
Our race, our age, our temper, live without
love !

OSBERN.

There's time for love.

CARLIOL.

Such patience sings a song !
I know the tune. Husbands hum it often—
Under their breath—bachelors, who are for-
tunate,

Whistle it while they run to meet their joy !

[*Turning to the company.*]

This rascal hath a wife hid in some nest,
Or else there is some virtuous, secret lady
For whose chaste soul it is a pleasure to
pray !

OSBERN AND URSYNE

OSBERN.

[*Bowing.*] My cousin is too gracious in his wit.

CARLIOL.

[*Bowing.*] Cousin, you may be saint or trespasser,
But either way a woman is the cause,
And, as a ship, she's crossed thy life's wild pool
And left her wake ! Come, own !

OSBERN.

[*Lightly.*] And if I own—

CARLIOL.

[*Giving him his purse.*
There's money for a gift.

COUNT GEOFFREY.

Most generous.

OSBERN.

[*Returning it with mock courtesy.*
Spend this in masses for thine own soul, Hugh !
I take thy jesting and thy cousinship
For they are rights of blood. But, when I
woo,
My gifts must be my wrongs—contempt and
poverty ;

OSBERN AND URSYNE

My claim must be my very lack of claim,
My charm, my humours, and my gold, my
grief!

Yet, for her love, I'll give a love so vast,
So constant, honest, true, and unremitting
That queens shall weep because they know it
not,
And blame their courts because they teach it
not,
And hate their wealth because wealth buys it
not!

CARLIOL.

Plainly, our Osbern must be kept from
queens
Or there shall be such scandal—

OSBERN.

[*Laughing.*] Mere froth, cousin,
Mere braggadocio : I have no love,
I think I cannot feel : I am a grave,
A grave without an epitaph. Alas !

ARLETTE.

[*In terror.*] Hark ! hark ! there's one that
knocks.

ALAN.

[*Peering out.*] Some stranger comes.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

OSBERN.

[*With a sardonic glance at ARLETTE.*
To grace the festival with that scarce virtue
We call a neighbour's love !

CARLIOL.

Bid him come in.

ALAN.

He rides a gaunt white horse.

ARLETTE.

[*Aside.*] Now let me steel
My spirit's broken wing. Up, up, faint love,
Thou hast a flight to fly past barbèd arrows.

ALAN.

[*From the door.*] It is Sir Eadric, son of that
Saxon chief,
Who, unbelieving in the Norman right,
Did foolishly rebel. They hanged him high.
I saw him swing for days. Can his son love
us ?

CARLIOL.

Still, let him enter.

COUNT GEOFFREY.

My lord, I know the knight,

OSBERN AND URSYNE

A bold, daredevil youth, mad at the chase,
Impatient under law, despising all
Who are not Saxon born.

ALAN.

No good, I'll swear.
Will come from this admittance.
[*With veiled sarcasm.*] Welcome, Sir Knight !

EADRIC *enters, and advances, bewildered.*

ARLETTE.

[*Going to meet him and speaking with a strong effort.*

Welcome, Sir Eadric. Much we feel thy
courtesy.

'Tis the acquittal from that debt of malice
Accumulated 'gainst us both by fortune.
And as beforetime there was enmity
Let there be blessedness now.

COUNT GEOFFREY.

You see us here,
Our senses all but overthrown with joy.
Thanksgiving makes us dumb. 'Tis well that
God,
Who reads the secrets of all hearts, can weigh
The gratitude that surges in us all.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

OSBERN.

Much He will weigh, be sure, and much
requite !

EADRIC.

[*Bitterly.*] My lord, I look upon this coun-
tenance,
Which, being too young to smile deceitfully,
Is to be read as well by men as angels !

OSBERN.

[*To URSYNE.*] Not all are blind that feel
the scourge of love.
Eyes washed by grief lose beauty but dust
also !

URSYNE.

[*To EADRIC.*] Sir Eadric may not know the
instant cause
Of our contentment.

EADRIC.

This only do I know,
That where there are fair women there will
be
Causes enough, without intemperate wonder,
To drown men in perdition.

ARLETTE.

Good Sir Eadric,

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Have gentler thoughts, you do misunderstand
us.

Carliol, whom we thought was foully slain,
Hath come again.

*[The sound of the harpists tuning up is
heard from the next room.]*

COUNT GEOFFREY.

And it is their betrothal,
Doubly insisted on, that we celebrate.

*[Servants bring in dishes and place them
on table.]*

ARLETTE.

[Staggering toward URSYNE.] Ursyne !

URSYNE.

She hath stood too long.

EADRIC.

I shall recount
This day in my joy's calendar !

CARLIOL.

[Going to EADRIC.] Sir Eadric,
In time to come we'll speak of this event,
Saying, The Saxon prince conquered unkind-
ness,
And, by that act, did make us bondsmen ever

OSBERN AND URSYNE

To his nobility. Come, my Arlette,
Come, true chivalry's king ! Old wine shall
give
Ripe feeling to new friendship !

ARLETTE.

[*To EADRIC.*] Will you not come ?

OSBERN.

What sly excuse shall be accepted for him ?
Pray, sirs, lead on. We, lacking brides, have
hunger.
Our uninspired bodies crave some food
More real than beauty.

For indeed a man possesses most surely
such good as he can put into his mouth and
swallow. The rest is all appearance, phan-
tasm, and the means to certain damnation.
Lead on ! Lead on !

EADRIC.

[*To ARLETTE.*] Madam, I'll sup to-night,
and this brave welcome
Will make my hard farewell a kind of grace.

[*ARLETTE goes to the table between
EADRIC and CARLIOL. COUNT
GEOFFREY makes a sign to URSYNE,
which she disregards. OSBERN goes*

OSBERN AND URSYNE

*to table, fills a goblet with wine and
returns to URSYNE.*

ALAN.

[*To OSBERN.*] “Will make my hard farewell
a kind of grace.”

Blackish words! Arrogancy and desperation run unexpiated in his veins. Take good heed! We swung his father high. Ah, it is silliness to pass a wolf because one is hunting foxes. Take good heed!

[*He goes to help at the table.*]

OSBERN.

The Earl doth wear the proud apparel of glory
As though he had digested it! This seems
To have enriched his bones, glistened his eye,
And filled his soul with satisfaction's balm.

URSYNE.

Thine eyes oft see that which thine heart
would veil!

OSBERN.

His glance—his kingly strut—his glory to
God!

Such are the men that women hang their
souls on

As votive trifles offered to the Highest.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Trifles, with just the gift of fiery tears,
Laughs, songs, smiles, blushes—all the ar-
moury
That puts weak flesh to torment : all the love
That purifies our natural baseness.
Trifles, which, made for heaven, may merit
hell,
By putting their whole trust on things like
that !
O, 'tis a poor affair ! Poverty most sick !
Why dost thou love him, Ursyne ? Thy
clear soul
Hath immortality for better use
Than this cold mountebank's pleasure. Did'st
thou not see
His tenderness to Arlette ?

URSYNE.

Could one be rough
To singing linnet frightened from her song ?

OSBERN.

Could one not swear, watching his deepening
gaze,
The lowering of his voice, the arm's fond
crook,
That he had never loved a maid save Arlette,
That his one thought, e'en ere her birth,
through years

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Was Arlette—Arlette—Arlette! Never for
him
Had woman virtue, comeliness, delight,
Away from Arlette. Hypocrite! Perjured!
False!

URSYNE.

You do him wrong. Is there a man would
feign
He had loved one—one only all his days?
That fool I have not met.

OSBERN.

This fool doth say so!
This fool must mean it too. His constancy
Is thought his prime misfortune, but I know
'Tis the sole good he hath. Ah! doubt it
not.

Why dost thou love *that*, Ursyne?

[*Pointing to* CARLIOL.

URSYNE.

Why dost thou
Love me? If I could give thee reasons,
Osbern,
I might, by speaking them, perceive their
frailty.
There is some cure whilst one can pick and
argue.
The *worst* I know: that is the worst of all!

OSBERN AND URSYNE

If, by discovering some mote or blemish,
Which, to my locked, enchanted sight had
 passed
For beauties in the earliest, mad, glad fever,
Then might I say it was the erring shadow
Of my own fantasy that I had loved,
No man at all, no soul, no great ambition.—
But, 'tis not so. I see the one thou seest.
The glance—the kingly strut—the glory to
 God,
All this I see. Yet, there is something more
That hath escaped your jealousy, but not
My heart. O, there's a winged spirit in him,
That, when our eyes may meet, looks o'er the
 brink
Of his humanity. This calls to mine,
And, as the sun draws vapour, so I rise
To that irresistible force.

OSBERN.

Alas, poor vapour ! Alas ! foul, trumpery
 sun,
Lit up by artifice to shine at festivals
On women ! O, vile lier in wait for
 dreams !
Never was talk so bitter-sweet of souls
But soon the creature fell with bodily hurt
Into a deep abyss. So help me God !
I'll save thee if I die for it !

OSBERN AND URSYNE

URSYNE.

Osbern,
Thy death would be my loss, and not my
safety.

OSBERN.

[*Muttering.*] Shall man do less than he ought,
or venture less,
Because Almighty God doth as he wills?

URSYNE.

Dear, we talk too long. I think they call me.

OSBERN.

I hear no call.

URSYNE.

Surely . . .

[URSYNE *rises as though drawn by a
compelling force and goes to the table.*

OSBERN *looks at her.*

COUNT GEOFFREY.

How now, singers !

[*Singers come forward. There is a
song ; OSBERN remains on the settle,
watching moodily the group at the
table ; MURIEL sidles up to him at
the conclusion of the song.*

OSBERN AND URSYNE

MURIEL.

Sir, that's a sweet air.

OSBERN.

And the sentiment ?

MURIEL.

Sweet ! [*Pauses.*] I was loved once.

OSBERN.

Who was he ?

MURIEL.

He died stone blind, and so he loved me till the end.

OSBERN.

Madam, some have passions of the mind ; others have passions of the body. It is as vain to make a virtue of the one as it is blasphemous to despise the other. All power comes from God, whether in the flesh or in the spirit ; yea, even the power to work evil. For out of evil itself comes nought but weakness, rottenness, destruction.

MURIEL.

Sir, if all knights wooed thus, the world would be free of much temptation !

OSBERN AND URSYNE

OSBERN.

Listen, poor sparrow. I have really a great and terrible passion, but 'tis a spiritual madness, an intoxication of the mind and nerves. I have sunk into a well of unappeasable longings, which, not fixed for any mitigation in this world, have fastened on my soul like the desire, hunger, and thirst for death and deliverance.

MURIEL.

O, sir, is all this for me?

OSBERN.

God forbid! What, should I offer thee so meagre a gift as my eternal perdition? Timid dove! Thou must learn men better. There's a love can find its one expression in sympathy and all its happiness in understanding. This do I feel for thee. Adieu!

MURIEL.

'Tis a sad case. He is not sick; this is sorrow of heart.

*[There is a dance, in which all join.
At its conclusion the company scatter;
OSBERN and URSYNE come down
stage.]*

OSBERN AND URSYNE

OSBERN.

Thou hast danced well.

URSYNE.

Thy step suits.

OSBERN.

Mine?

URSYNE.

With thine.

'Tis the first time, I think, we two have
danced,

Or heard, together, music tuned for joy.

Yet, of my life, this is the darkest night,

The longest, saddest, weariest, last night.

OSBERN.

Wherefore *last* night?

URSYNE.

Day hath deserted me.

OSBERN.

Day comes at dawn.

URSYNE.

I shall not see the dawn.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

OSBERN.

Art thou afraid?

URSYNE.

Of what?

OSBERN.

Of loving me.

URSYNE.

What meanest thou?

OSBERN.

This is false loyalty.

URSYNE.

You hurt my hand.

OSBERN.

I thought it was a flame!

URSYNE.

[*Smiling.*] Wouldst put it out?

OSBERN.

Nay; I would burn myself.

URSYNE.

[*Musing.*] And we have danced.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

OSBERN.

As any lovers might !

URSYNE.

I forgot all.

OSBERN.

I lived.

URSYNE.

It was the harp

Bewitched us so.

OSBERN.

No harp !

URSYNE.

Harps may do much.

OSBERN.

Hath love less power ?

URSYNE.

Not less . . . [*Confused.*] I know not.

Let us but say we have been happy once.

OSBERN.

And is that all ?

URSYNE.

It is the very world,

OSBERN AND URSYNE

And worlds again, and still a heaven of
worlds !

OSBERN.

Happiness, *once* !

URSYNE.

Remembrance for all time.

OSBERN.

And then, despair !

URSYNE.

Then, waiting quietly.

OSBERN.

We were not happy once—for I was sad,
Thou dost constrain thine heart and torture
mine.

This is not gladness ; never think it is,
Nor ever think 'twas either harp or dance
Which gave thy face the perfume of the rose
And something fairer than the rose's flush.
This is love's miracle when love meets love !

URSYNE.

I met no love : it is too far from me.

OSBERN.

Need that have been ?

OSBERN AND URSYNE

URSYNE.

God saw that there was need !

OSBERN.

He sent me near.

URSYNE.

Thou art not he I loved.

OSBERN.

And yet one day—

URSYNE.

It was an Autumn day.
You found me sleeping, and you watched me
long
Until I spoke and called you.

OSBERN.

In your dream !
I answered you, and you stretched out your
hand,
And said, ‘ Thy love is stronger than our fate,
Thy spirit, when I die, shall join with mine,
And keep it fast for ever. This I know ! ’

URSYNE.

O strange and faithful words ! That dream
was true.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

OSBERN.

Fate is strong . . .

URSYNE.

As life.

OSBERN.

Love hath no master.

And if I win . . .

URSYNE.

I would not have thee fail !

OSBERN.

Tell me thy thought.

URSYNE.

Pure love doth conquer hell.

OSBERN.

I'll strive with . . .

URSYNE.

What ?

OSBERN.

With death and hell for thee.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

URSYNE.

And never tire ?

OSBERN.

Love tires not.

URSYNE.

Promise this.

OSBERN.

Hast thou a doubt ?

URSYNE.

O, promise this to God !

OSBERN.

I promise it.

URSYNE.

Thy love shall save us both.

OSBERN.

Is there sore peril threatening us, Ursyne?
Tell me thy thought.

URSYNE.

Thy love shall save us both !

*[She moves away. The bell is heard
ringing for Matins.]*

OSBERN AND URSYNE

COUNT GEOFFREY.

[*Rising.*] Now prayer and praise give unction
to our peace.

This holy hour will pour its consecration
On hopes so long deferred, fulfilled at last.

[*He goes out, and all follow him into chapel, beyond where there should be an iron screen concealed by a curtain, which, being drawn back, may show the Monks passing through. URSYNE is following the rest, when CARLIOL intercepts her. OSBERN escapes up the staircase, where he crouches. URSYNE waits for CARLIOL to speak.*]

CARLIOL.

Ursyne ! I cannot pray. In agony
All is sensation. My part shall be to kiss
Lips that shall speak to me no more this
night

Till they have learnt some kindness, and are
less

Like scented alabaster, cut to tempt,
Not to be tempted. [*He embraces her.*]

Ah, my very self,
Long have I ached and fretted for this near-
ness,

OSBERN AND URSYNE

This heart more passionate than a wave, and
purer
E'en than th' intangible breeze that fans great
storms. [*She tears herself away.*
Ah, not so cold ! Your snow puts out my fire,
Is this a way to win love or to keep it ?

URSYNE.

I had no way of winning or of keeping
That which I gave to thee—my faithful love.
Faithful it is and love it is. What else—
It would bereave thee—couldst thou know—
to learn.
When I did think thee dead, the woman in
me
Was all distinguished. Hast thou not seen
lights
Burn brightly for a while, then, suddenly,
After some futile waving in the wind,
Go out in utter darkness ? I was so.

CARLIOL.

I'd sooner drink the wine of the condemned
Than guess the saltness of thy tears. But
look,
We waste the moments men may hardly buy
At grim Eternity's unchangeable price.
A kiss—though nothing less or more—a kiss !
A brief close union of our arms.—My life

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Was surely given back again for this.

Much love. . . . [*He embraces her.*]

URSYNE.

But that is perfidy, not love !

CARLIOL.

Hast thou cast off all pity for me, Ursyne ?

URSYNE.

Would that I had !

CARLIOL.

God put into my portion
Certain advantages, which, falsifying
Their promises, have turned into calamity.
Vigour, high station, tastes, desires, aims
Pitched far above my compeers ; but, to mar
all—

I was betrothed, while yet a senseless boy,
Careful of beasts and dogs—amerced in
muscle,

A fellow most detestable, small doubt——

URSYNE.

Ah, never !

CARLIOL.

Be that as it may. I was

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Betrothed, and, at the unlikeliest age for choosing.

Nought do I urge against Arlette.

URSYNE.

You could not.

CARLIOL.

God save her—no ! 'Tis innocence on earth
Her eyes do swim in awe. It thinks, I swear,
It has for husband Michael the Archangel !—
No smaller prize ! I would not have her make
An idol of me, Ursyne !

URSYNE.

Let us pray not.

CARLIOL.

[*With meaning.*] Sweetheart, there is some
future for us still.

URSYNE.

Aye, there's a future.

[*A pause.*

CARLIOL

Therefore let no gloominess
Rob thy enchantments of their potency.
Weave all around this burning heart thy
charms,
And Carliol the dauntless will be wax

OSBERN AND URSYNE

For these small hands to mould for good or evil.

URSYNE.

[Looks at him for some seconds before she speaks.]

My lord, this may not be.—What good I do
(And even such as I may still do good)
Must be by faltering prayers and not by
witchcraft.

What thy reported death did to my love
This last hath well accomplished for my
body.

Shadows already seem to me like sisters.

I'll come again. *[He makes a protest.]*

I have forgiven thee.

I'll come again.

[URSYNE goes into the chapel.]

*[OSBERN waits till she is out of sight,
then creeps down the staircase and
confronts CARLIOL.]*

OSBERN.

O, we are kin indeed !

Whilst you are traitor, I am eavesdropping.

I have no land, no patent of nobility,

But I will make thee come into thy kingdom

By shorter road than thou hast travelled
yet!

OSBERN AND URSYNE

CARLIOL.

What! dost thou play the madman in my
presence?

David, forsooth, before the wicked foe!
As thou hast David's wit, show David's heart.
He loved fair women!

OSBERN.

Aye!

CARLIOL.

When he repented,
'Twas not for fugitive, effeminate thoughts,
But for some certain deeds which prophets
censure,
Philosophers define, and men commit!
I love that lady. When the mad hour comes
That preludes all true penitence, I'll beg
Thine honourable absence. Virtue hath grace!

[OSBERN *springs at him and strikes him
to the heart with his knife.*

OSBERN.

Fierce glittering snake in my dark wilderness!
Evil am I, and evil too art thou!
Thy love is cruel—mine is but a curse.
From hell thou cam'st—to hell thou shalt
return!

[*Strikes again.*

OSBERN AND URSYNE

[The body falls so as to be concealed by a high-backed seat. Before curtain descends, OSBERN creeps up the stairs stealthily, taking a torch with him.]

END OF ACT II.

ACT III

SCENE I

SCENE: *The same as Act II. As curtain rises, EADRIC comes out of the chapel, goes to the table where he had been sitting before, and sits there plunged in thought. A faint murmuring may be heard of the prayers in the chapel. This may last for two minutes, then the household come out of the chapel and pass up the stairs. MURIEL, JACQUELINE, and BLANCHE run across, followed by some men. CECILY and HENRY are last.*

CECILY.

Canst catch me, Henry?

HENRY.

If I wished I could. Women are easily caught.

CECILY.

Yes, they are full of kindness.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

HENRY.

But they are better loved when they are less kind.

CECILY.

True, for man is such a reptile of ingratitude that he can only give love with cheerfulness where it is not wanted.

HENRY.

Dost doubt my love for thee, Cecily?

CECILY.

Nay, for I abhor—detest, loathe and repudiate thee, therefore thou must love me for ever. There's no cure either way. We may make a happy marriage yet!

[She rushes past him up the stairs, and he follows her amid laughter from the other girls. EADRIC, as the household comes out, has stood aside. ARLETTE now comes out and looks round to see if they are overheard before she speaks to him.]

ARLETTE.

And must you go? O, is't good-bye between us?

OSBERN AND URSYNE

When in old days I heard of woe like ours,
I cried to think such sorrow ever was.

EADRIC.

And shall you be Carliol's happy wife?

ARLETTE.

I am his wife, for I am bound to him.

EADRIC.

But you love me?

ARLETTE.

Yes, so I bid thee go.
I'll take my memory from its broken frame
And give it up to God. I shall not think of
thee,
For, when I may, it will mean I love thee not.
Now leave my soul, my heart, my mind, my
sight
While I can say good-bye and hear thee
answer. . . .

EADRIC.

Arlette !

ARLETTE.

Eadric !

EADRIC.

Yet he will call thee Arlette

OSBERN AND URSYNE

And watch this face and kiss these stars that
weep. . . .

There's much for men to do, yet, when all's
done,

All's said, all planned, all's thought, there still
is much

That men have to forget. And this is hardest
Of all his labour underneath the sun.

Farewell, sweet Arlette, now an end is come
To time and words ! All that remains is life.

*[He kisses her hand ; she unbars the
door and lets him out. She leans
against the doorpost and seems
stunned with grief. URSYNE and
COUNT GEOFFREY come out of the
chapel.]*

COUNT GEOFFREY.

I take it ill. There will be talk of this !

And an example of indifference

To Heaven's bounty. I fear lest swift
rebuke

Is near upon him. He should have joined
us.

*[URSYNE, during this speech, has been
looking down the stage to where she
left CARLIOL ; she now gives a
piercing shriek, and throws herself
upon her father, covering her eyes.]*

OSBERN AND URSYNE

URSYNE.

O, I see forms and horrid spectres raised
To drive me mad !

COUNT GEOFFREY.

How now, what ails thee, Ursyne !
There are no spectres. This is some sudden
sickness.

Look up, look well, defy these childish fears !

[URSYNE looks again, and this time
seems petrified with terror. GEOFFREY
follows the direction of her
gaze, and observes in the darkness
the form of CARLIOL on the floor.]

COUNT GEOFFREY.

[*With a laugh.*] 'Tis Alan drunk again. Ho !
there—a torch !

Discipline at these times is hard maintained.
A torch, I say !

URSYNE.

[*Slowly.*] Then, dost thou see it too ?
[*She leaves him and glides down to the
body, kneels and lifts the head.*]

COUNT GEOFFREY.

[*Going up and out, calling.*] Ho ! there—a
torch !

OSBERN AND URSYNE

[ARLETTE comes down from doorway, bringing with her a torch from over it. She brings it down close and sees URSYNE in the darkness holding the head of CARLIOL in her arms.]

ARLETTE.

But there is blood upon him—see—there is blood !

URSYNE.

[*Slowly.*] This wound cannot be stanch'd—
he hath been dead

A little while. [After a long pause.]

Who hath done this, Arlette ?

ARLETTE.

How should I know, Ursyne ?

URSYNE.

This is base murder.

ARLETTE.

Hath he an enemy ?

URSYNE.

Thou couldst answer that.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

ARLETTE.

Indeed, there's no one who would hate
Carliol.

URSYNE.

Oh, crowning falsehood ! Cast no thorns in
mine eyes !

ARLETTE.

What meanest thou by these harsh blamable
words ?

His very enemies praised him.

URSYNE.

A bad sign.

An enemy's praise heralds all treachery,
And grows the sweeter as revenge looks
surer !

Who praised him last ?

ARLETTE.

All truly praised him always !

URSYNE.

My life for yours if this crime hath no
punishment !

I could have pardoned much hadst thou not
lied.

But to stand there with innocent, startled face
As though some eagle had thee in his claw,

OSBERN AND URSYNE

When thou art full to th' crop with deadly
venom—

Deceit past our conception and all credence—
That fear would rather be for honest eagle,
Who touched a thing so stuffed with per-
fidy!

Think of the name thou never utterest!

ARLETTE.

*[With a cry of horror as though a
sudden suspicion struck her.]*

Eadric!

*[Then hastily covers her face with her
hands.]*

URSYNE.

[Laughing.] Had Eadric cause to work
Carliol harm?

Say—had he cause, urged on by thy white
evil

To plot and execute this coward's thrust?

[Gazing down on CARLIOL.]
Death never gathered pain from face more
tranquil.

No fearfulness is here. This filthy world
Has ta'en its cruellest tax. *[Kisses the brow.]*

I'll come again.

*[She rises, quits the body, and goes
towards ARLETTE.]*

OSBERN AND URSYNE

I would have spared thee—nay, I shall spare thee yet.

The vengeance that cries out in me still fails
From all its purpose, for as I loved thee once,
And thought thee pure—habit remains to bind
A judgment horribly reversed by proof—
By hideous proof of thy corruption.

Yet . . . I cannot forsake thee. . . .

But, for the mean, false, fierce, and brutish
villain,

Who taught thee how to lie, and schooled thy
glance

To look on murder with a little gaze,

There is no mercy——

[*Enter COUNT GEOFFREY, followed
by ALAN. ALAN bears two torches,
one in each hand.*

URSYNE.

Come, why do ye wait?

Carliol hath been dead this little while.

COUNT GEOFFREY.

[*Going over to the body and kneeling
by it.*

God in high heaven!

ALAN.

Is there a God or heaven? .

OSBERN AND URSYNE

URSYNE.

Aye, drunken ape ! there are both, and something more.
Canst thou, through thy drugged wits, detect
the hand
That could inflict a stab on heart so rare ?

ALAN.

The Saxon hath done this. Did he not speak
Of hard farewells ? This is that in good
faith !
I did foretell it all. God rest his soul !
Help ! help, there ! help ! God rest his soul !
Here's murder !

*[Some of the men of the household come
down the staircase and go toward
COUNT GEOFFREY.]*

COUNT GEOFFREY.

Lift up his body with great reverence.
He was a king of princes, and a knight
Who fought no foe save infidelity, and loved
His enemy as himself. Most brave Carliol !

URSYNE.

Let the dead bury their dead ! Shall we shed
tears ?
Shall we lament while we should be avengers ?

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Eadric hath done this.—Eadric then must die
for it.

Then, when bare justice hath been satisfied,
There will be time enough to greet the
sorrow

I dare not yet encounter, and, for this
present,

Hold far away lest its kiss come too soon !

COUNT GEOFFREY.

Hath Eadric gone ? Did any see him leave ?

ALAN.

[*Pointing to door of chapel.*] He knelt there
by the door, and rose from's knees

Before the Fidelium Animæ was reached,
Or I had thought of waking. His gross
step

Disturbed the servants' prayers, but when he
murdered

He had a lighter grace ! I heard no noise.

COUNT GEOFFREY.

Then let us hunt this hell-rat ! I'll not sleep
Nor eat, nor rest, until the time to weep.

[*The men lift the body on to a bench.*

URSYNE stands by, looking down
upon the face. ARLETTE does not

OSBERN AND URSYNE

move from the floor where she is crouching. COUNT GEOFFREY and the men go out.

END OF SCENE I.

SCENE II

SCENE : OSBERN'S room. OSBERN is sitting on his bed.

OSBERN.

Nay, no remorse : no wishing that undone
Which, being done, sends triumph, like hot
 smoke,
Through all my veins, till I seem as a cloud
Floating in the pre-eminent infinite, and
 gathering
Fresh transports while I move. O, depths
 and heights !
If I know not thy joy I know thy fury,
And, whirling in thy giddy impetus, I toss
On thy distracted currents. Love is not mine,
Th' obliteration of self in passion's intense
Delight ;—the horror of war and its mad
 issue
'Midst fire and pain and blood and arrogance—

OSBERN AND URSYNE

The odour of death and groans of wounded
men—

The carrion crows for corpses and the banquet
For licensed murderers—these two are not
In my damnation! But, I have killed a
spirit

So vile, corrupting and insidious
That it could seem a man and flatter life
By adding to the crowd of things existent
His admirable form. His heart could bleed :
I saw the purple stream. Its lethal fumes
Have crept from thought to thought till all I
feel,

Or know, or think, or have remembrance of
Is that first thrill on touching his life's
pulse

With this keen blade. Yet if they slay me
now,

Would not wild joy so steep my mind in
gladness

That torture would be impotent, and death
But the augmentation of my consciousness,
Increasing bliss somewhat restrained and vexed
By this confinement in the body's cell.

[A knocking is heard.]

They come for me.

HENRY.

[Outside.] Sir, sir, open the door !

OSBERN AND URSYNE

OSBERN.

Is there such haste?

HENRY.

O, sir, 'tis past all haste !

[OSBERN *opens the door and* HENRY *enters.*

OSBERN.

[*Surprised to see him alone.*] Did you dare
come alone ?

HENRY.

Aye, sir, to you.

'Tis a fair haven here. I'll tell thee all.

First let me bar the door.

OSBERN.

Wouldst sit with me ?

HENRY.

I trust none other after this night's deed !

I've heard of chattering teeth—mine chatter
now!

Carliol hath been butchered by Sir Eadric !

OSBERN.

What's this? Speak clearer ! Who hath
done it? Speak !

OSBERN AND URSYNE

HENRY.

The Earl went not to Matins. He erred
through wine,
And sate unarmed, asleep, helpless, alone,
With half the torches gone, and not a soul
To warn him of Sir Eadric's stealthy step.
He crawled from prayers and crept along the
floor,
And smote the great Carliol as you hit
Some swinish beast. The blood came pouring
out.

OSBERN.

Didst thou then see Sir Eadric when he struck?

HENRY.

Nay, but that's how he struck. 'Tis the
received
Belief, none can gainsay the truth of that.
Our lady Arlette grows into the earth,
So low is she with sorrow. Lady Ursyne . . .

OSBERN.

Ursyne !

HENRY.

She watcheth by the body and doth seem
More used to death than life. Count Geoffrey
hunts
The murderer, and hath sworn to take no rest,

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Nor bite, nor slumber, till he hath the wretch,
And burnt his eyes in their sockets, and
quartered him,
And drawn him limb from limb, and hanged
him high
To rot and shake in chains on some bleak tree
On ground accursed for ever ! O, that he had
Ten bodies to be slaughtered ! One skinful
of flesh
Is not enough to appease our appetite
For vengeance !

OSBERN.

Is Ursyne pale ?

HENRY.

So pale—
She is as white as rain, and seems to fall
Although she is upright.

OSBERN.

Have they left my horse ?

HENRY.

Nay, Alan rides him.

OSBERN.

Then get me what thou canst.
Wait not for bit or saddle ; I must ride

OSBERN AND URSYNE

And overtake the pursuers ere they slake
Their thirst in innocent blood. Go—I will
follow.

[HENRY goes and OSBERN looks round
the room.

Walls, ye have seen much suffering : the worst
Must be endured in ravenous publicity.
Yet, when I die, I'll think of this bare room,
And wonder if the grave will be so gentle
As these still granite wings ! . . . For the
last time.

[He looks round the room and dashes out.

END OF SCENE II.

SCENE III

SCENE : *The same as Scene I. URSYNE is
standing by the bier, at each corner of which
a torch burns. ARLETTE crouches on the
ground at the foot of the body of CARLIOL.
A lad is waiting by the door. The monks
are heard chanting in the chapel :*

Dies iræ, dies illa,
Solvat sæclum in favilla,
Teste David cum Sibylla.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

Quantus tremor est futurus,
Quando Judex est venturus,
Cuncta stricte discussurus !

[*As they finish this verse, OSBERN appears at the top of the staircase and loud shouting of men is heard at the door. It is opened by the lad. COUNT GEOFFREY, ALAN, and other men drag in EADRIC, who is bound, pinioned, and gagged.*

COUNT GEOFFREY.

Bring in the slayer. Confront him with the slain.

Look on thy handiwork : drink in the sight,
For 'tis the last that thy malignant eyes
Shall see till they awake to scorch in hell.

ARLETTE.

Wilt thou not let him speak ?

OSBERN.

Unloose those cords
And bind them where they fit more righteously !
If there were guilt in sending this bright toad
Down to th' infernal slime wherein he grew,
Then lay this to my charge, for I am guilty !

OSBERN AND URSYNE

URSYNE.

All I have ever loved ! O, my soul dies.
[*She looks down at the knife in CARLIOL's
belt and her hand moves toward it.*

COUNT GEOFFREY.

[*To OSBERN.*] This grief, poor Osbern, hath
estranged thy reason !
Wert thou arraigned for this mad, heinous
crime,
It would go hard with thee. I could not spare
Where God most merciful hath cursed. The
penalty
Is so severe that, thinking on't, my bones
Melt, and all my blood is changed to brine.

OSBERN.

Ah ! take thy justice. Here's my knife—'tis
stained !

ALAN.

What ! shall fiends walk among us boasting
thus
Of their iniquity ?
[*The men rush upon OSBERN and seize
him.*

URSYNE.

[*Rousing herself.*] First loose the innocent.
[*The men leave OSBERN and go to*

OSBERN AND URSYNE

EADRIC. URSYNE goes up to
OSBERN, concealing behind her the
knife.

URSYNE.

Osbern !

[A look passes between them. She turns
to COUNT GEOFFREY.

Let me speak with him.

[They step apart from the others.

OSBERN.

No words.

URSYNE.

This was fierce jealousy.

OSBERN.

Not jealousy.

Yet I was jealous. And it was not doubt :
Although I doubted. God !——

URSYNE.

It was not fear,
Fear is not in thy nature. What then was't?

OSBERN.

A jest one thought too deep : it sank to
hell :
I kept it there—lest it should crawl to thee.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

URSYNE.

They'll burn thine eyes, and draw thee limb
from limb—

OSBERN.

Don't weep for that—

URSYNE.

And torture thee and hang thee . . .

OSBERN.

All too quick. I'd have more time for
loving—

I'd have more time to think on thy farewell,
And dream again I danced with thee one night,
And know again, in memory, the scent
Of that white flower, thy face. I need no
sight.

URSYNE.

My kinsmen, once resolved, do never pause
From their intent. And I foresee such
things—

OSBERN.

Man must deal justice ; mercy is with God.
I pray to God—not men. Here I'll not falter.
The end is nearly come. . . . God forgives
much.
He suffered much.

OSBERN AND URSYNE

URSYNE.

The flood of pain that waits thee
Fills up the cup of vengeance to the brim,
And flows till hate itself is drowned in anguish.
[Hoots and cries are heard outside.]

COUNT GEOFFREY.

All hell will soon be loosed! Horror on
horror
Presses.

URSYNE.

[To OSBERN.] What I shall do, I do for grief,
not hate.

[Aloud.] So—ere a worse befall thee—I give
thee this,

In token of my wrath and some compassion.

*[She stabs him; she covers her face and
reels backward with a cry;]*

COUNT
GEOFFREY *rushes forward, but*
OSBERN *stands between them and*
takes URSYNE in his arms.

OSBERN.

Leave us together now : have I not won?
She's mine. O Ursyne, thou art mine at
last!

Had I another heart to be thus riven
I'd take its agonies surpassing all I've felt,

OSBERN AND URSYNE

To know again thou caredst enough for me,
O, my beloved, to do this mortal sin !

URSYNE.

The night is gone and morning is come unto
me . . .
Yet . . . am I still alone ?

OSBERN.

[*Points in the distance.*] See . . . see . . .
one waits !

My love shall save us both : 'twas given for
this.

Our path is scarleted though not with flowers !
Our hearts must hover o'er that smoking
chasm

Which reaches to the nethermost. But look—
Not downwards ; love, we are not wingless yet,
Still may we rise though centuries shall pass
Ere we can reach the sky !

[*He kisses her as she dies, then rolls
over on his face, dead.*]

ARLETTE.

O, are they dead ?

COUNT GEOFFREY.

Now let the world come in !

OSBERN AND URSYNE

EADRIC.

Rest to their spirits ! Satan hath tried them
sore.

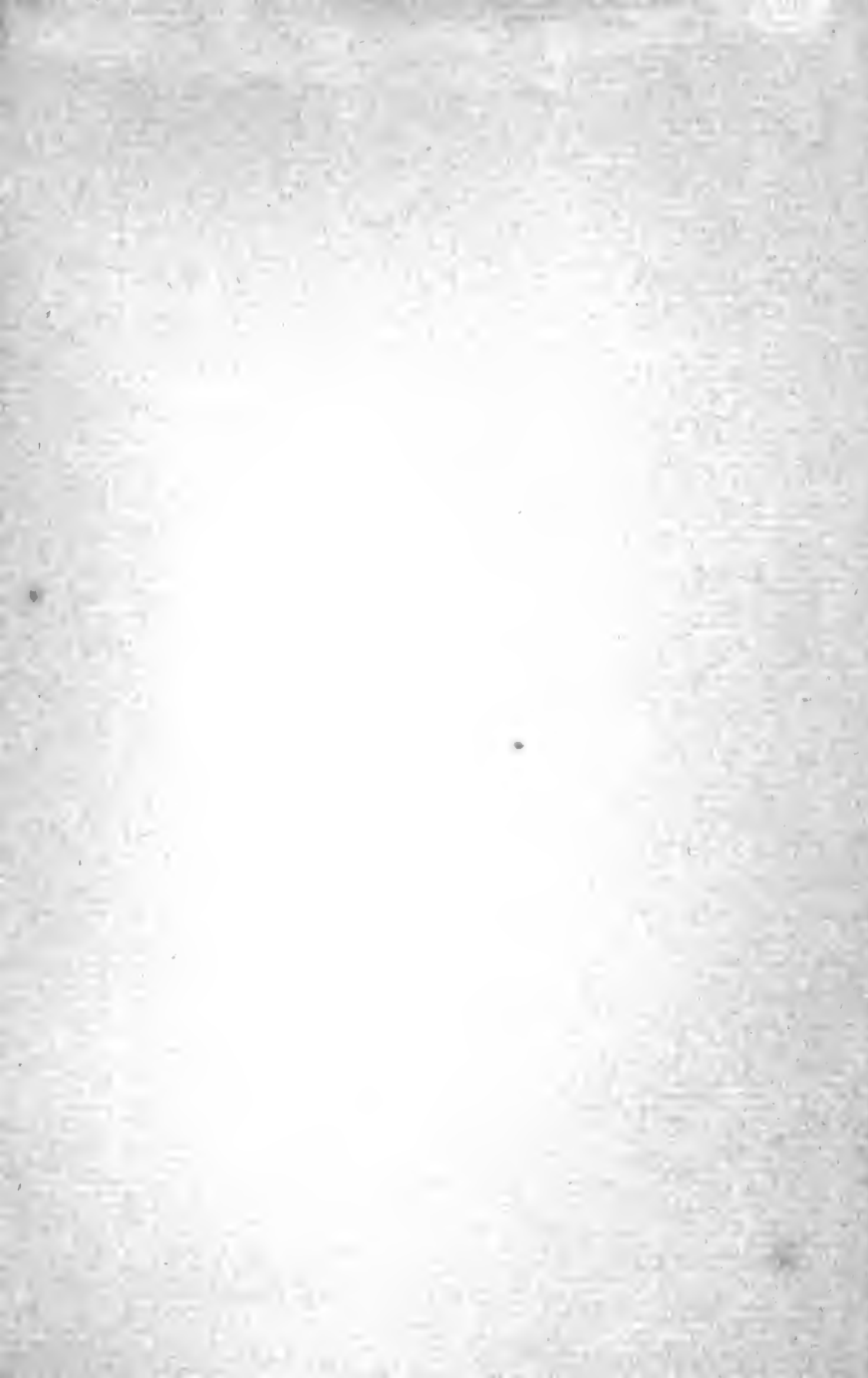
God shall adjudge them now : man, never
more !

*[The Monks are heard chanting in the
chapel.]*

Recordare, Jesu pie,
Quod sum causa tuæ viæ :
Ne me perdas illa die.

THE END.





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